

Questions and Answers About the Garfield Flat Wild Horse Gather January 2012

Why is the BLM gathering wild horses from the Garfield Flat Herd Management Areas?

As described in the “Proposed Action” of the *Garfield Flat and Marietta Herd Management Area Gather Plan Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (December 2011) the purpose and need for the wild horse gather is to remove excess wild horses and implement population growth controls. The wild horse gather would: return the wild horse populations to the established Appropriate Management Level (AML); reduce population growth rates; achieve compliance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (CRMP 2001); prevent degradation of public lands within and outside the HMA; restore or maintain a thriving natural ecological balance; and re-establish a multiple use doctrine consistent with the *Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act* (WFRHBA) of 1971.

Aerial population inventories were completed in 2010 and 2011 and it was determined that the Garfield Flat Herd Management Area (HMA) has an excess population of wild horses. The wild horse population for the HMA is estimated to be 240 animals, 157 animals above low AML. The AML for the Garfield Flat HMA/Allotment was established by a 1996 Multiple Use Decision (MUD). AML was set at 83 to 125 horses within the Garfield Flat HMA.

During the summer of 2011, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) personnel conducted field investigations to determine the level of forage utilization attributable to wild horses. Heavy and severe utilization of forage by wild horses was documented in the Garfield Flat HMA and the adjacent Marietta Wild Burro Range.

The wild horse gather would remove approximately 72 wild horses from within and 85 wild horses outside the Garfield Flat HMA. The BLM would also apply PZP-22, a fertility control, to approximately 26 to 33 mares prior to being released back into the Garfield Flat HMA. Following the gather, 83 horses will remain in the HMA to achieve the low AML level.

When did the BLM last gather in these HMAs?

The Garfield Flat HMA was last gathered to remove excess wild horses in 2009. A total of 205 horses were gathered and 135 removed. Of the horses returned to the HMA, twenty-one (21) mares were treated with Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP-22) prior to release.

Is the BLM removing wild horses to make room for more livestock grazing?

No. The BLM previously allocated forage between wildlife, wild horses, and livestock in the 1996 MUD for the Garfield Flat HMA/Allotment. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed lands has declined nearly 50 percent since the 1940's; of that authorized use, actual use has declined by 30 percent since 1971 (the time of enactment of the WFRHBA).

Was the Proposed Action considered in the Final EA?

The Final EA analyzed the Proposed Action and a No Action Alternative. The Final EA also considered but eliminated six alternatives from detailed analysis that ranged from reducing or eliminating livestock grazing, to increasing AML for horses, to the use of bait trapping, etc.

Population Questions**What are the estimated wild horse populations for this HMA?**

Aerial population inventories were completed in 2010 and 2011. The wild horse population for the Garfield Flat HMA is estimated to be 240 animals.

Why doesn't the BLM gather to the high range of the AML?

A post-gather population size at the upper limit of the AML would likely result in the AML being exceeded with the next foaling season. The upper limit of the AML represents the maximum population at which a thriving natural ecological balance can be maintained. Reducing numbers to the lower limit allows for a periodic gather cycle of approximately every four years and prevents the AML from being exceeded during the intervening period between gathers.

What is the foaling season of wild horses?

Generally wild horses foal from March through June, but could also foal year-round. At the time of this gather, most 2011 foals would be between six and nine months of age and would be considered "weaned."

Gather Process Questions**Where is the BLM gathering horses?**

Actual gather locations will depend upon where the wild horses are located when the gather process begins. Previous year trap sites may be used, or new locations would be utilized. The BLM will provide the public with information on meeting places during gather operations.

What is the description of the environmental setting where the gather will take place?

The HMA is located approximately 10 miles southeast of Hawthorn, Nevada. The topography of the HMA ranges from flat valleys through mountainous terrain from 5,003 feet to 9,973 feet in elevation. The HMA contains approximately 141,800 acres of public and private land within the BLM-Carson City District, Stillwater Field Office. The dominant vegetation consists of Utah juniper (*Juniperus ostosperma*), bottlebrush squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), Nevada ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), Needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*), desert needlegrass (*S. speciosa*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*).

Will the BLM remove all the wild horses that are gathered?

The wild horse gather would remove approximately 72 wild horses from within and 85 wild horses outside the Garfield Flat HMA. The BLM would also apply PZP-22, a fertility control, to approximately 26 to 33 mares prior to being released back into the HMA.

Will the BLM use fertility control on this gather?

All mares to be returned to the Garfield Flat HMA would first be treated with PZP-22. Based on a gather efficiency of 80 percent, the BLM anticipates that approximately 26 to 33 mares from the HMA would be treated with PZP-22.

How does PZP affect the mares?

When injected, the PZP (antigen) causes the mare's immune system to produce antibodies that bind to the mare's eggs, effectively blocking sperm and fertilization. Application of PZP-22 to a pregnant mare would not affect the development of the fetus. PZP-22 has had no apparent effect on pregnancies in-progress, the health of off-spring, or the behavior of treated mares. A study in 2010 found no differences in how PZP-treated mares (compared to non-treated mares) allocated their time between feeding, resting, travel, maintenance, and other social behaviors in three studied populations of wild horses. The treatment process would be handled by trained staff. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) for use of PZP-22 are found in Appendix A of the Final EA. Mares receiving PZP-22 would experience increased stress when handled and freeze-marked. Any swelling or local reaction to the injection site would be short-term and localized.

How are fertility control and adjusting the sex ratio implemented?

Excess wild horses would be removed using a selective removal strategy as follows: 1.) *first priority*: age class – four years and younger; 2.) *second priority* – age class – eleven to nineteen years; 3.) *third priority* – age class – five to 10 years; and 4.) *fourth priority* – age class – 20 years and older would not be removed from the HMAs unless specific exceptions prevent them from being returned to the range. All mares to be returned to the Garfield Flat HMA would first be treated with PZP-22. Based on a gather efficiency of 80 percent, the BLM anticipates that approximately 26 to 33 mares from the HMA would be treated with PZP-22.

A sufficient number of stallions would be selected for release to bring the post-gather sex ratio to approximately 60 percent male. This, in combination with fertility control measures, would help reduce population growth rates in the Garfield Flat HMA. Stallions would be selected to maintain a diverse age structure, herd characteristics and body type (conformation). It is expected that releasing additional stallions to reach the targeted sex ratio of 60 percent males would result in smaller band sizes, larger bachelor groups, and some increased competition for mares. With more stallions involved in breeding, increased genetic exchange and improvement of genetic health within the herd is anticipated.

How does the BLM gather wild horses?

Gather operations would include the use of a helicopter, although in areas where there are only a few animals, personnel may herd the animals and collect them directly with trucks pulling horse trailers. All gather and handling activities would be conducted in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) (See Appendix B of the Final EA).

Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather wild horses, isn't that inhumane?

The WFRHBA authorizes the BLM to use helicopters to gather wild horses, as well as motorized vehicles to transport gathered animals. The use of helicopters and motorized vehicles has

proven to be a safe, effective, and practical means for the gather and removal of excess wild horses and burros from the range. Since July 2004, Nevada has gathered 26,000 animals with a mortality rate of 1.1 percent (of which 0.5 percent was gather related) which is very low when handling wild animals. The BLM also avoids gathering wild horses prior to and during the peak foaling period and does not conduct helicopter removals of wild horses during March 1 through June 30 unless under emergency situations.

Though the wild horses experience a heightened stress level for the short period of time that the helicopter is herding the animals towards the gather corrals, animals calm down quickly afterwards. Helicopter gathers require less than a third of the time of traditional water or horseback trapping methods.

Other methods of gathering wild horses on horseback or water trapping can be effective in small gathers and in confined spaces, but they are not nearly as efficient as helicopter gathers. Water trapping can be very effective when water resources are scarce but nearly impossible otherwise. Also, this method is very time consuming.

Using horseback riders to herd the horses into gather corrals is very difficult in large open areas of public lands. This practice is very hard on the domestic horses and the riders; both have a high likelihood of being injured. This method is very inefficient and takes an enormous amount of time to complete.

Does the public have input regarding the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles in managing wild horses?

Section 9 of the WFRHBA requires that a public hearing be held prior to the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles. A public hearing is held annually on a State-wide basis regarding the use of motorized vehicles, including helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, in the management of wild horses. During these meetings, the public is given the opportunity to present new information and to voice any concerns regarding the use of the motorized vehicles. The Ely District Office hosted the State-wide meeting on June 15, 2011; the current gather operation SOPs were reviewed in response to concerns expressed and the BLM determined that no changes to the SOPs were warranted.

Does personnel use whips to move the wild horses through the pens and chute?

The BLM uses flags or noise-making paddles to move wild horses through the pens and chutes. The flags are usually made by attaching a plastic grocery bag to the end of a sorting stick or buggy whip. The flag prevents the stick or whip from hitting the horse with any sort of impact or sting to it. Seeing and hearing the plastic flag motivates the animal to move away from the source of the stimulus. This technique is similar to those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

Is this an emergency action?

No. The Proposed Action is to gather a sufficient number of horses so as to remove excess wild horses within and outside the Garfield Flat HMA and apply population control measures to

mares that would be released back into the HMA. This gather is part of on-going regular management and maintenance of wild horse populations.

What happens to the wild horses that don't go back on the range?

Wild horses removed from the range would be transported to a short-term holding facility at the National Wild Horse and Burro Center in Palomino Valley, near Reno, Nevada using trucks with stock trailers. Animals would be segregated by sex and age, and loaded into separate compartments. Upon arrival at the short-term holding facility, the wild horses would be off-loaded and placed into holding pens where they are provided water and hay. After some time of adjustment to the short-term holding facility, the animals would be prepared for adoption. Veterinary care and preparation includes freeze-marking with a unique identification number, vaccination from common diseases, castration of studs, and de-worming. Individual animals not placed into adoption would be transported to long-term pastures in the Midwest. As of August 2011, approximately 35,800 wild horses reside in long-term pastures and approximately 11,500 excess wild horses are located in BLM's short-term holding facilities.

Will any of the wild horses be sent to slaughter?

In accordance with BLM, no wild horse will be sold to slaughterhouses or to persons that would sell the animals to slaughterhouses.

Why is BLM gathering in the winter months?

One of the primary reasons for gathering in the winter is that the fertility control treatments to mares are most effective when applied during the months of November through February. During this gather, the mares should be several months from foaling. The health and condition of all wild horses moved to the gather site will be continually monitored for any adverse gather effects.

Winter is the preferred time to gather horses due to the terrain and elevations which make it difficult to gather wild horses from the higher elevations during summer months. The terrain is also rocky, and past experience indicates that fewer injuries to hooves and legs occur during winter gathers in this area. Wild horses are able to travel farther and over terrain that is more difficult during winter gathers—as compared to summer gathers—because any snow on the ground cushions the bottom of their hooves when traveling over rocky terrain. Water intake requirements are less during winter months, making this timeframe less apt to cause distress from heat exhaustion.

How does the BLM select its gather contractors?

The BLM's national gather contracts were awarded in 2010 following an in-depth technical review of the proposals received from the prospective contractors. Among the key elements of the technical review was evaluation of the prospective contractor's knowledge, skill and ability to gather and handle wild horses and burros in a safe, effective and humane manner. The BLM's contractors have demonstrated the knowledge, skill and ability to gather and handle these animals safely, effectively and humanely.

What contractor will be conducting the gather?

Sun J Livestock of Vernal, Utah.

Range/Grazing Questions**Is there livestock grazing in this area?**

Under BLM permitting, term livestock grazing occurs within each of the three HMAs. The grazing allotments (GAs) are described below.

Grazing Allotments and Authorized Livestock Use.

Allotment	% in HMA	HMA	Active Preference	Actual use AUMs 2010-11	Season of use
Garfield Flat	58	Garfield Flat	694 cattle; 3,513 AUMs	1,793	11/01 - 4/15
Belleville	8	Marietta	55 cattle; 303 AUMs	303	11/01 – 4/15
Marietta	100		No Livestock	N/A	N/A

Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

Yes. A wide variety of wildlife species common to the Great Basin ecosystem can be found in the HMA, including: mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, and numerous raptors, reptiles, and other small mammals. As part of its multiple-use mission, the BLM is mandated to provide habitat to support these various wildlife species.

Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure. Continuous grazing by wild horses does not allow plants sufficient time to recover from grazing impacts. Such overgrazing results in reduced plant health, vigor, reproduction, and ultimately a loss of native forage species from natural plant communities. Over time, this greatly diminishes habitat quality as abundance and long-term production of desired plant communities is compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

Why don't you just make more land available to the wild horses and burros?

Under the WFRHBA, wild horses can only be managed on areas of public lands where they were known to exist in 1971 (the time of enactment of the WFRHBA).

Adoption Questions**How can I adopt one of the wild horses?**

The excess wild horses removed from the range are offered for adoption to qualified people through the BLM's Adopt a Wild Horse or Burro Program. Potential adopters must have the proper facilities and financial means to care for an adopted animal, and we always hope that they have experience working with a wild horse or burro, which will help ensure the gentling process.

During the first year, the BLM retains title to the animal(s), and will conduct compliance checks throughout the year in an effort to ensure, as much as possible, that the animal is properly

being cared for and has gone to a good home. At the end of the first year, if the adopter has complied with all the adoption stipulations and has properly cared for their wild horse for one year, he or she is eligible to receive title, or ownership, from the federal government.

The BLM has placed nearly 225,000 wild horses and burros into private care since the adoption program began in 1971. To apply to adopt a wild horse or burro on-line, please go to the BLM's adoption website at:

http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro/What_We_Do/wild_horse_and_burro0.html

If you are interested in adopting directly from one of the BLM's holding facilities, please visit the agency's facilities page.

For more information about the BLM's Adopt-A-Horse or Burro program, please visit http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro.html

Or call 1-800-4Mustangs with any questions about the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.

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